

EMERGING CHRISTIANITY AND GRAECO-ROMAN CULTURE: TENTATIVE ANSWERS TO AN OLD QUESTION*

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The relationship of early Christianity and the Graeco-Roman culture of early Imperial times —often discussed under the simplifying slogan of «Hellenization of Christianity» —is an issue that has been hotly debated throughout the centuries. Among the fathers of the church Jerome and Tertullian, e.g. were vocal in their denunciation of pagan civilization, but they were nevertheless deeply indebted to Greek «Paideia» as writers and thinkers. The writings of the New Testament also demonstrate this ambivalent attitude shown in the article by examples taken from Paul's epistles, the Letter to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation. There is no doubt at all that Hellenistic Judaism, especially of the Diaspora, took a decisive role as mediating agency between Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture. But this is not the only or the full answer to our basic question. We need a more sophisticated methodology and stratified strategy to adequately describe the cultural interaction that took place on different levels. The fact that we still have enough material to even approach this task is itself a result of this very process of interaction. For it was mainly through Christianity that the heritage of Graeco-Roman Antiquity was handed down through the ages to modern times.

1. *A series of test cases*

(1) Jerome, the well known translator of the Bible, in one of his early letters (of 384 CE) pointedly asks: «What does Horace have to do with the psalms?

* Presentation delivered for the SNTS at the «Universal Forum of Cultures» at Barcelona, August 4, 2004. Special thanks are due to Rebecca P. Waltenberger for her careful editing of the English text.

What does Virgil have to do with the gospels? And what does Cicero have to do with the apostle (Paul)?»¹ The answer is in each case: next to nothing. Jerome repeats these questions in a slightly different form more than three decades later: «What do Aristotle and Paul have in common? What do Plato and Peter have in common?»² The results are similar.

(2) All this is of course an echo of Tertullian's famous aphorism: «What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What does the Academy have to do with the Church?» And —this is precisely Tertullian's point— «what do the heretics therefore have to do with the Christians?»³ This shows that for «him, Athens stands for Greek philosophy and “human wisdom”, and “Jerusalem”... represents Christian faith uncorrupted by the sophistication of speculation and learning.»⁴

(3) We can trace this argument to the writings of the New Testament, as Jerome himself does when he quotes Paul. He alludes to a passage in Second Corinthians, which might even be un-Pauline in origin,⁵ where we read: «What fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar?» (i.e. Satan; cf. 2 Cor 6:14-15). He quotes further 1 Cor 10:21: «You can not drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demons» at the same time.⁶

It is easy to identify similar positions in other parts of the New Testament. To give just two more examples:

(4) Revelation, the New Testament apocalypse, takes a very negative stance against Graeco-Roman culture, civilisation, politics, and religions. The Roman Empire is inspired by the great dragon who was thrown down to earth from heaven, and takes the shape of a horrible beast with seven heads, rising out of

1. *Epistula 22* (= *Libellus de virginitate*), 29 (CSEL 54,188-189); cf. Alfons FÜRST, *Hieronymus: Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2003), pp. 140-142.

2. *Adversus Pelagianos* 1,15 (CChr.SL 80,18).

3. *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7,9 (Dieter SCHLEYER, *Tertullian: De praescriptione haereticorum / Vom prinzipiellen Einspruch gegen die Häretiker* [Fontes Christiani 42; Turnhout: Brepols 2002], 244,16-18): *Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? quid academiae et ecclesiae? quid haereticis et christianis?*

4. Dale B. MARTIN, «Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy: Toward a Social History of the Question», in Troels Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2001), pp. 29-61, p. 31.

5. Thus Hans DIETER BETZ, «2Cor 6:14-7:1: An Anti-Pauline Fragment?», *JBL* 92 (1973) 88-108; also in ID., *Paulinische Studien: Gesammelte Aufsätze III* (Tübingen: Mohr 1994), pp. 20-45; see the discussion of this issue in Margaret E. THRALL, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. I: *Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark 1994), pp. 25-36.

6. Cf. Dale B. MARTIN, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1995), pp. 182-189.

the Mediterranean Sea (Rev 12-13).⁷ A voice from heaven advises the Christians: «Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins» (Rev 18:4). «Her» in this quote refers to the great city of Babylon, a code name for the Roman Empire. Even if we do not understand this literally, that is as a command for Christians to leave their cities and homes, it implies at least the necessity of taking a spiritual distance from the surrounding culture.⁸

(5) This is in some ways an especially radical and extreme position. But it is, on the other hand, not so far removed from an admonition we find in the closing chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews: «Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the (heavenly) city that is to come» (Heb 13:12-14).⁹

2. A Second Run

If we are trying to establish some positive links between emerging Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture, the case seems pretty hopeless by now. There seems to be only pronounced antagonism across the board. This result might even be welcome to many, as it proves the originality, creativity and independence of the Christian movement. And we have a natural inclination to think in binary oppositions, which are by the way basic for computer technology. Things are much simpler, if you only have the choice between Yes and No, without any «perhaps» to raise scepticism and doubt.

7. See Steven J. FRIESEN, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University 2001); Paul B. DUFF, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University 2001); Heinz GIESEN, «Das Römische Reich im Spiegel der Johannes-Apokalypse», *ANRW* II/26,3 (1996) 2501-2614; also in Id., *Studien zur Johannesapokalypse* (Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 29; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk 2000), pp. 100-213.

8. David E. AUNE, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1998), p. 991: «It appears more likely, however, that the summons to flee from the city is used symbolically, with the city referring to the demonic social and political power structure that constituted the Roman empire, while the summons to flight refers to the necessity of Christians disentangling themselves and distancing themselves morally, and perhaps even socially, from the corrupt and seductive influences of Roman rule in Asia»; see also Jens-W. TAEGER, «Begründetes Schweigen: Paulus und paulinische Tradition in der Johannesapokalypse», in Michael TROWITZSCH (ed.), *Paulus, Apostel Jesu Christi: Festschrift für Günter Klein zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1998), pp. 187-204, esp. pp. 200-201.

9. A particularly apt exposition of this passage is found in David A. DE SILVA, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle «to the Hebrews»* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2000), pp. 500-504; cf. esp. p. 503: the status described here is one of «permanent liminality».

Unfortunately history, as far as we can still construct it at all, does not work this way. It is usually much messier and more complicated.¹⁰ A second closer look at the witnesses we have adduced so far¹¹ reveals a picture considerably different from this black or white mode.

(1) Jerome himself was of course a very cultured man. He must have had excellent training in grammar and rhetoric in his youth. His command of Latin style is outstanding, and he knew his classical authors very well, in fact too well in his own estimation. His strictures quoted above introduce the report of a dream, which he had in his mid or late twenties, around 370 or 375 CE. He was reading Cicero and Plautus (or Plato?)¹² at night, when he was suddenly brought before the heavenly court. When he confessed to be a Christian, the judge answered: «You are lying. You are a follower of Cicero, not of Christ (*Mentiris, ait, Ciceronianus es, non Christianus*)»,¹³ and gave the order to beat him. Jerome was compelled to promise not to study pagan literature any longer, or at least not as exclusively as before.¹⁴ Otherwise he would be punished again. He clearly was of two minds, and the dream is a nicely condensed version of the continuous task he was facing, namely to mediate between his

10. See in our case Wayne A. MEEKS, «Judaism, Hellenism, and the Birth of Christianity», in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, pp. 17-27, esp. the subtitle on p. 23: «Complicating the Picture.»

11. There are many more, of course. Clement of Alexandria e.g. in his *Protrepticus* and in passages of the *Stromateis* would give a good example of an innovative adaptation of Greek philosophy and culture (see Salvatore R. C. LILLA, *Clement of Alexandria: a Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* [Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971]; Dietmar WYRWA, *Die christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandrien* [AKG 53; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 1983]), whereas Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos* might serve as an expression of a rather strong antagonism (Otis Carl EDWARDS, *Barbarian Philosophy: Tatian and the Greek Paideia* [Ph.D. thesis; The University of Chicago, 1972]; Martin ELZE, *Tatian und seine Theologie* [FKD 9], Göttingen 1960; Emily J. HUNT, *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian* [Routledge Early Church Monographs; London: Routledge 2003]), and so on. On the towering figure of Origen see now Mark Julian EDWARDS, *Origen Against Plato* (Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity; Aldershot – Burlington: Ashgate 2002). On the strong influence of rhetoric and classical «paideia» in an individual case see the excellent study of Margaret M. MITCHELL, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (HUTH 40; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000).

12. See Neil ADKIN, «Plato or Plautus? (Jerome, *Epist.* 22,30,2)», *Emerita* 62 (1994) 43-56.

13. *Epistula* 22,30 (CSEL 54,189-191); cf. Barbara FEICHTINGER, «Der Traum des Hieronymus – ein Psychogramm», *VigChr* 45 (1991) 54-77.

14. See Barbara FEICHTINGER, «*Nec vero ille fuerat aut vana somnia ...* (Hier., *ep.* 22,30,6): Überlegungen zum geträumten Selbst des Hieronymus», *REAug* 43 (1997) 41-61, p. 58: «Hieronymus hat, wie wir aus den Jahrzehnte später stattfindenden heftigen Auseinandersetzungen mit seinem Intimfeind Rufinus von Aquileia wissen, seine Beschäftigung mit heidnischem Schrifttum nie wirklich aufgegeben»; on more general lines, see Harald HAGENDAHL, *Latin Fathers and the Classics: a Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers* (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia 6; Göteborg: Almqvist & Wiksell 1958).

Graeco-Roman heritage and the Biblical tradition, in which he would immerse himself more and more.

(2) About Tertullian's biography we are less well informed. We do know that he lived between 160 and 220 CE, grew up in a pagan family, had an extensive education (like Jerome), and converted to Christianity in his late thirties (197 CE). Where it suits him, he makes ample use of Greek thinking for his own ends. In his criticism of pagan myths, for example, he adopts the argument that the Greek and Roman gods had been human beings of old,¹⁵ which goes back to the Greek author Euhemerus.¹⁶ He calls Seneca, the Roman politician and Stoic philosopher, *Sicut et Seneca saepe noster*, «Seneca, often one of our own» or «ever our Seneca».¹⁷ The high praise which he accords to Seneca is also reflected in an apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and the apostle Paul.¹⁸

(3) This brings us again to Paul, who spent a major part of his missionary career in the Graeco-Roman cities of Syria, Asia Minor and Greece, and finally at Rome.¹⁹ «Come out of her, my people», we have heard in Rev 18:4. Paul seems to give just the opposite advice, when he tells the Corinthians in 1 Cor 5:9-10: «I wrote to you in my (former) letter not to mix indiscriminately with immoral people. In no way did this refer to people in secular society who are immoral or grasping or who practice extortion or idolatry, since you would

15. *Apology* 10-11 (Carl BECKER [ed.], *Tertullian: Apologeticum / Verteidigung des Christentums* [München: Kösel 1961], pp. 94-105).

16. See Massimo FUSILLO, «Euhemerus», *Der Neue Pauly* 4 (1998) 235-236.

17. *De anima* 20,1 (Jan Hendrik WASZINK, *Tertullian: De Anima* [Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff 1947], p. 28,18); Jerome (*De viris illustribus* 12) and Augustine (*Epistula* 153,14) even thought Seneca to be a convert to Christianity; cf. L. Michael WHITE and John T. FITZGERALD, «*Quod est comparandum: The Problem of Parallels*», in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (NT.S 110; Leiden: Brill 2003), pp. 13-39, p. 17; the discussion about the alleged Christianity of Seneca is still going on, see e.g. Léon HERRMANN, *Sénèque et les premiers chrétiens* (CollLat 167; Brüssel: Latomus 1979); Joël SCHMIDT: *L'apôtre et le philosophe: Saint Paul et Sénèque, une amitié spirituelle?* (Paris: Albin Michel 2000), and Berry in the following note.

18. See Cornelia RÖMER, «The Correspondence between Seneca and Paul», in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. II (rev. ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1992), pp. 46-53; Abraham J. MALHERBE, «"Seneca" on Paul as Letter Writer», in Birger A. PEARSON *et al.* (eds.), *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991), pp. 414-421; Alfons FÜRST, «Pseudepigraphie und Apostolizität im apokryphen Briefwechsel zwischen Seneca und Paulus», *JAC* 41 (1999) 41-67; Paul BERRY, *Correspondence between Paul and Seneca, A.D. 61-65* (Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 12; Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press 1999).

19. Cf. Wayne A. MEEKS, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1983); also in German as *Urchristentum und Stadtkultur: Die soziale Welt der paulinischen Gemeinden*, trans. by Sieglinde Denzel and Susanne Naumann (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser – Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1993).

then be obliged to withdraw from the world.»²⁰ The implication is: I do not want this. You do not have to leave this world. Rather, Christian brothers and sisters who are misbehaving should be excluded from the life of the community (v. 11: «I am writing to you not to mix indiscriminately with someone who accepts the name of Christian and remains immoral ... With such a person you should not even share your table»). But you have to live as Christians within the structures of this world. And often, you must also live according to popular and common moral standards, established by —among other sources— Stoic philosophy. This allows Paul to be rather vague and selective in his ethical instructions more than once.²¹ (Incidentally, the closest known parallel to Paul's practice of directing communities from the outside by letters is Epicurus, the founder of Epicurean philosophy, who wrote letters to friends and followers throughout the Mediterranean world.)²²

(4) The book of Revelation is a special case; we have to admit this. But it is helpful to see that the New Testament does not simply speak with one voice in these matters. And in Revelation too we find a kind of polemical adaptation of non-Jewish and non-Christian cultural phenomena. The heavenly liturgy in this book is partly modelled on the ceremonies practiced at the imperial court,²³ or in other words: «The Jesus of the Apocalypse wears the Emperor's clothes.»²⁴

(5) For the author of Hebrews, true reality is found in a trans-worldly, heavenly realm. What we see here below is only a sketch and a shadow of it (cf. esp. Heb 8:5; 9:11.23-24; 10:1). Therefore the future kingdom of God is transformed in Hebrews into «a kingdom that cannot be shaken», that still remains, when all created things have been removed (Heb 12:27-28). But precisely this way of thinking is Platonic or better Middle-Platonic. Our author shares this perspective with one of the leading philosophical schools of his day. At this point Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher and theologian, is often brought in, as a mediator between Hellenistic philosophy and the author of

20. The translation of this passage (and of v. 11) follows Anthony C. THISELTON, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, and Carlisle: The Paternoster Press 2000), p. 408; see also Brian S. ROSNER, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-8* (AGJU 22; Leiden et al.: Brill 1994), pp. 61-93.

21. As a test case, see e.g. Will DEMIG, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004).

22. Cf. now Peter ECKSTEIN, *Gemeinde, Brief und Heilsbotschaft: Ein phänomenologischer Vergleich zwischen Paulus und Epikur* (Herders Biblische Studien 42; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2004).

23. Cf. David E. AUNE, «The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John», *BR* 28 (1983) 5-26.

24. See Ernest P. JANZEN, «The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes», *SBL.SP* (1994) 637-661; Allen BRENT, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (VigChr.S 45; Leiden: Brill 1999), pp. 164-209.

Hebrews,²⁵ but this is perhaps not necessary. A good case can be made that the author of Hebrews had first-hand knowledge of Middle-Platonic thought.²⁶ This might lead one to ask whether Christianity is «no more than Plato with a faint Palestinian accent»²⁷ —an exaggeration, no doubt, but a well directed one.

3. Some Basic Issues

Let us move on from the test cases to some more basic issues. It is an indisputable fact that all writings of the New Testament were composed in Greek, and originally so. Contrary to some earlier hypotheses there is no hard evidence at all for more extended sources in Aramaic or Hebrew underlying our texts. Retroversion into Aramaic seems possible for a couple of sayings of John the Baptist and Jesus, but generally scholarship nowadays is very cautious about such claims.²⁸ What has been claimed as Aramaism often is only an imitation of the style of the Septuagint,²⁹ the Greek Old Testament, or else has been identified as a feature of popular Greek narratives.³⁰ But this, if true, is a fact of primary importance, since «Hellenism» in antiquity is defined above all

25. Esp. by Ceslas SPICQ, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, vol. I (Études Bibliques; Paris: Gabalda 1952); Id., «L'Épître aux Hébreux et Philon: un cas d'insertion de la littérature dans la culture profane du Ier siècle», *ANRW* II/25,4 (1987) 3062-18; rather sceptical is Ronald WILLIAMSON, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ALGHJ 4; Leiden: Brill 1970); see also L.K.K. DEY, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (SBL.DS 15; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press 1975).

26. See Wilfried EISELE, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrief* (BZNW 116; Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2003); James W. THOMPSON, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: the Epistle to the Hebrews* (CBQMS 13; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association 1982).

27. Robert M. GRANT, *Gods and the One God* (LEC 1; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press 1986), p. 170; this is an allusion to Numenius, the Platonic philosopher of mid second century CE, who wrote: «What else is Plato than a Moses who speaks Attic?» (cf. Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 9,6,9 [GCS 43,1, 493,19f.] and 11,10,14 [43,2, 28,10f.]: Τίς γάρ ἐστιν Πλάτων ἢ Μωϋσῆς ἀττικίζων;).

28. Matthew BLACK, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon 1967), was much too optimistic; admirable caution is shown in the collected essays of Joseph A. FITZMYER, *The Semitic Background of the New Testament* (The Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997).

29. See Eckhard PLÜMACHER, *Lukas als hellenistischer Schriftsteller: Studien zur Apostelgeschichte* (StUNT 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1972), pp. 38-79; Marius REISER, *Sprache und literarische Formen des Neuen Testaments. Eine Einführung* (UTB 2197; Paderborn: Schöningh 2001), pp. 33-48.

30. See Marius REISER, *Syntax und Stil des Markusevangeliums im Licht der hellenistischen Volksliteratur* (WUNT 2,11; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1984).

by the correct use of the Hellenic, i.e. Greek language.³¹ From this perspective the New Testament is a collection of Hellenistic texts, and as such is deeply embedded in the Graeco-Roman culture of its day.

The self-designation of the groups that stand behind these texts is also highly significant. The leading term clearly is ἐκκλησία, nicely preserved in the Spanish *iglesia*, the Catalan *església* and the French *église*, although unfortunately no longer in Italian (*chiesa*), German (*Kirche*), or English (*church*). Since the days of Aristophanes' comedy Ἐκκλησιάζουσai, «Assembly-women», this expression has served political ends, though it may have come to the early Christians by a detour. It was already «borrowed by the LXX translators from the political language of democratic Athens to describe Israel assembled at Sinai, "God's civic assembly"», but it is then also «entirely appropriate to a group that conceives of itself on the model of an immigrant association, a kind of city within the city or a transplanted *politeia*»,³² namely the Christian community. That Judaism, especially Hellenistic Judaism,³³ of which the earliest Christian movement was quite simply one sub-group among others,³⁴ often functioned as a kind of bridge or zone of transition, is undeniable. But this only strengthens the main argument: Hellenism was part and parcel of the Christian design by means of two sources: first and immediately, by the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture, and second as that culture was mediated by Hellenized Judaism.

4. Some Perspectives

Adolf von Harnack, the great historian of the ancient church in the early 20th century, was instrumental in a debate, commonly designated by the catch-

31. Hans Dieter BETZ, «Hellenism», *ABD* 3 (1992) 127-135, p. 130: «The primary characteristic for Hellenism is the language; secondarily it is the way of life, education, and ethos mediated through that language»; Dieter TIMPE, «Hellenismus I. Zum Begriff», *RGK* 3 (2000) 1609-1610.

32. Wayne A. MEEKS, «Corinthian Christians as Artificial Aliens», in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, pp. 129-138, p. 135.

33. See John M.G. BARCLAY, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: Clark 1996); Lee I. LEVINE, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1998); for case studies, see David T. RUNIA, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (CRI 3,1; Assen: Van Gorcum, and Minneapolis: Fortress 1993); Pieter W. VAN DER HORST, *Hellenism – Judaism – Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 8; Kampen: Kok Pharos 1994).

34. MEEKS, «Judaism, Hellenism, and the Birth of Christianity», p. 26: «Christianity began its existence as one among several competing Jewish sects or movements.»

words «Hellenization of early Christianity».³⁵ The basic thesis is very simple, and it describes a history of decline and corruption, movement away from the pure biblical message of Jesus of Nazareth, still uncontaminated by any external influence, to later theological speculations which were heavily based on Greek philosophy. According to Harnack, the break took place somewhere in the second century, not later than Irenaeus of Lyon. The «religionsgeschichtliche Schule»³⁶ took a decisive step further by projecting this break into the New Testament and locating it between Jesus and Paul,³⁷ a move perhaps inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, who saw Paul, not Jesus, as the true originator of Christianity.³⁸

35. See Dietmar WYRWA, «Hellenisierung des Christentums», *RGK* 3 (2000) 1608-1609, 1613-1614, esp. 1609: «Das Faktum der H(ellenisierung) als solches läßt sich kaum in Abrede stellen»; Joachim DRUMM, «Hellenisierung», *LThK* 4 (1995) 1407-1409 (Lit.); a very full bibliography is found in Klaus THRAEDE, «Antike und Christentum», *LThK* 1 (1993) 755-759; esp. on Harnack cf. E.P. MEIJERING, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums im Urteil Adolf von Harnacks* (VNAWL 128; Amsterdam: North Holland Publications 1985).

36. Cf. Gerd LÜDEMANN and Martin SCHRÖDER, *Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule in Göttingen: Eine Dokumentation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1987); Gerd LÜDEMANN (ed.), *Die «religionsgeschichtliche Schule»: Facetten eines theologischen Umbruchs* (Studien und Texte zur religionsgeschichtlichen Schule 1; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang 1996); Gerald SEELIG, *Religionsgeschichtliche Methode in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart. Studien zur Geschichte und Methode des religionsgeschichtlichen Vergleichs in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 7; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2001); Hans Dieter BETZ, «Religionsgeschichtliche Schule», *RGK* 8 (2004).

37. A strong corrective to this view is now presented by John Howard YODER, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. Ed. by Michael G. CARTWRIGHT and Peter OCHS, *Radical Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2003), esp. in the chapter «Paul the Judaizer» on pp. 93-101, see e.g. p. 95: «Far from being the great Hellenizer of an originally Jewish message, Paul is rather the great Judaizer of Hellenistic culture. He comes with his monotheism into a polytheistic world, with his ethical rigour into a hedonistic world. He teaches Aramaic prayers to Gentile believers and expands the Pharisaic *chabourah* or love fest into a celebration of inter-ethnic unity.» Not convincing is, on the other hand, Hyam MACCOBY, *Paul and Hellenism* (London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International 1991).

38. See Friedrich NIETZSCHE, «Morgenröthe. Erstes Buch 68: Der erste Christ», in Giorgio COLLI – Mazzino MONTINARI (eds.), *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, and Berlin: De Gruyter, ²1988), pp. 64-68: «Dass in ihr (scil. der Bibel) auch die Geschichte einer der ehrgeizigsten und aufdringlichsten Seelen und eines ebenso abergläubischen als verschlagenen Kopfes beschrieben steht, die Geschichte des Apostels Paulus, wer weiss das, einige Gelehrte abgerechnet? ... Dies ist d e r e r s t e C h r i s t, der Erfinder der Christlichkeit! Bis dahin gab es nur einige jüdische Sectierer»; Id., «Der Antichrist 42», in Giorgio COLLI – Mazzino MONTINARI (eds.), *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 6 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, and Berlin: De Gruyter ²1988), pp. 215-217: «In Paulus verkörpert sich der Gegensatz-Typus zum „frohen Botschafter“, das Genie im Hass, in der Vision des Hasses, in der unerbittlichen Logik des Hasses. Was hat dieser Dysangelist Alles dem Hasse zum Opfer gebracht! [...] er erfand sich eine Geschichte des ersten Christenthums ...»; «Der Antichrist 46», pp. 223-225: «Was folgt daraus? Dass man gut thut, Handschuhe anzuziehen, wenn man das neue Testament liest»; «Der Antichrist 58»,

As with most great ideas and dominating paradigms, there is a moment of truth in this theory, otherwise it would not have instigated such a hot and persistent dispute, which is still going on today. But most of us are no longer prepared to speak of a break that took place somewhere. It is more a continuous process, a kind of constant negotiation of cultural values that had already begun with the first Christian generation (the famous «Hellenists» of Acts 6:1),³⁹ and developed differently on different levels, in different groups, and in different social and geographical locations. A whole range of possible attitudes characterizing the interaction of Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture has been realized: imitation, adaptation, accommodation, critical evaluation, also outright opposition and antagonism, and this could be done both unreflectively or reflexively. The «very instability of cultural formations»⁴⁰ which is emphasized by post-modern thought, must be taken into account as well. Originality and creativity do not necessarily imply total independence. They can also be realized by creating a new synthesis or a new master narrative out of elements, which were already present.

Both Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture were finally shaped and changed by this interaction. The real question may well be who took more and who gave more. I am tempted to apply to this issue a line with which the Roman poet Horace described the relationship between victorious Rome and subdued Greece:

*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis
intulit agresti Latio ...*

«Greece was conquered, but it conquered the untamed victor too, and introduced arts and culture to the rustic Romans.»⁴¹ In a similar way, Greece brought to Christianity language, rhetoric, literature, art, and philosophy, which

pp. 245-247: «Was er errieth, das war, wie man mit Hülfe der kleinen sektiererischen Christen-Bewegung abseits des Judenthums einen "Weltenbrand" entzünden könne, wie man mit dem Symbol "Gott am Kreuze" alles Unten-Liegende, alles Heimlich-Aufrührerische, die ganze Erbschaft anarchistischer Umtriebe im Reich, zu einer ungeheuren Macht aufsummiren könne»; I am not convinced that exegesis and theology have yet adequately dealt with this provocation by Friedrich Nietzsche. Just ignoring it does not help, nor do the apologetic attitudes one usually finds.

39. An excellent analysis of Acts 16:1-7 is found in Ralph NEUBERT, *Demokratie im Volke Gottes? Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte* (SBB 46; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk 2001), pp. 15-96; cf. also Craig C. HILL, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1992).

40. MARTIN, «Paul and the Judaism/Hellenism Dichotomy», p. 60.

41. *Epistulae* 2,1,156-157. Gerd HERRMANN – Gerhard FINK, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Sermones, Epistulae / Satiren, Briefe* (Sammlung Tusculum; Düsseldorf – Zürich: Artemis & Winkler 2000), pp. 230-231; cf. FÜRST, *Hieronymus*, pp. 142-143: «Die eroberte Antike nahm den rauen Sieger gefangen und führte die Bildung in das bäurische Christentum ein.»

were to become indispensable components of the explication of the Christian kerygma in theory (i.e. theology) and in practice (i.e. ritual and liturgy).

In the end, Christianity proved to be a very grateful disciple. We often tend to forget a very simple but highly important fact: What remains of classical antiquity in textual form has been preserved mainly by Byzantine monks and scribes who faithfully copied Greek authors and thus saved their works for posterity.⁴² I would say that by rough estimate eighty percent of our knowledge of antiquity has come to us only through this channel. That we today are able to even discuss such a topic as «Emerging Christianity and Graeco-Roman Culture» is by some irony of history both a sign and a result of the debt that Christianity felt it owed to the classical world and was willing to pay.

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Resum

La relació entre el cristianisme primitiu i la cultura greco-romana de la primera època de l'Imperi —sovint classificada sota el simplificador epígraf d'«hel·lenització del cristianisme»— és un tema que ha estat debatut al llarg dels segles.

Entre els Pares de l'Església —Jeroni i Tertul·lià, per exemple— va ser utilitzat en la seva denúncia de la civilització pagana, si bé ells eren profundament deutors de la *paidéia* grega com a escriptors i pensadors. Els escrits del Nou Testament mostren també aquesta ambivalent actitud expressada en el present article amb exemples trets de les cartes de Pau, la carta als Hebreus i el llibre de l'Apocalipsi. No hi ha cap dubte que el judaisme hel·lenístic, especialment el de la diàspora, va tenir un paper decisiu com a agent mediador entre el cristianisme i la cultura greco-romana.

Però aquesta no és l'única o la més completa resposta a la nostra qüestió bàsica. Necessitem una metodologia més sofisticada i una estratègia estratificada per a descriure adequadament la interacció cultural que es va donar a diversos nivells. El fet que disposem encara ara de suficient material per a aproximar-nos a aquesta tasca és en

42. See Hartmut ERBSE, «Überlieferungsgeschichte der griechischen klassischen und hellenistischen Literatur», in Herbert HUNGER *et al.* (eds.), *Die Textüberlieferung der antiken Literatur und der Bibel* (Wissenschaftliche Reihe 4176; München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag 1975), pp. 207-283; Herbert HUNGER, «Handschriftliche Überlieferung im Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit, Paläographie», in Hans-Günther NESSELRATH (ed.), *Einleitung in die griechische Philologie* (Stuttgart – Leipzig: Teubner 1997), pp. 17-44.

si mateix una conseqüència d'aquest procés d'interacció. En efecte, va ser principalment a través del cristianisme com l'herència de l'antiguitat greco-romana s'ha mantingut a través dels segles fins als temps moderns.